
P A R K S A N D
O P E N S P A C E



Introduction

Almost one-fifth of North Cambridge is land used for open space. Seven city-owned parks, playgrounds, tot lots and fields, combined with the natural land in the Metropolitan District Commission reservation at Alewife total 86 acres, or 18 percent of the neighborhood. (See map on page 87.) In addition, the City is converting the former City landfill on Sherman Street just outside the neighborhood boundary, to a 55 acre park. This multi-use facility, named Danehy Park, will include athletic fields, three tot lots, and jogging and bicycling paths, as well as extensive space for passive recreation. Danehy Park is expected to open in 1990.

The City of Cambridge is also in the process of revising its maintenance policies. In 1988, a consultant was hired to review current maintenance operations, provide recommendations for improvements, and develop a city-wide park maintenance management system. By 1989, it is anticipated that residents will witness a marked improvement in the maintenance and repair of parks and playgrounds.

Neighborhood Survey Results

(1) The majority of North Cambridge residents do not consider the amount of recreational facilities or the condition of the parks to be a problem in their neighborhood.

- When asked about the lack of recreational facilities in North Cambridge, 20 percent said it is a major problem, 30 percent said it is a minor problem, and 41 percent said it is no problem.
- When asked about rundown parks, 16 percent said it is a major problem, 34 percent said it is a minor problem, and 44 percent said it is no problem.
- Forty-five percent of residents think that the condition of the neighborhood's parks and recreational areas has improved over the past five years, 31 percent said it has stayed the same, and 10 percent said it has become worse.

(2) Residents are fairly evenly divided on whether the lack of open space in North Cambridge is a major problem (26%), minor problem (32%), or no problem (38%).

(3) Thirty-six percent of North Cambridge residents said environmental quality is a major problem in their neighborhood, 29 percent think it is a minor problem, and 28 percent said it is no problem.

Study Committee Concerns

(1) **Planning:** The Committee expressed the need for more open space planning. For example, members thought it would helpful if the neighborhood and City had data showing who is using the various parks in North Cambridge. They would like to know the ages of people living near specific parks to make sure that the park design and equipment best meet the needs of these particular people. Finally, the Committee wondered whether there were any groups of people who are currently prevented from using the parks for various reasons.

(2) **Community Involvement:** The communities surrounding the individual parks in North Cambridge need to become more involved and to feel a greater sense of ownership over the parks. This should be done allowing residents a greater degree of participation in all facets of park planning, design and maintenance.

(3) **Better Management:** Park planning, design and maintenance are carried out by different city agencies. This sometimes results in a lack of coordination on park issues. A more organized and cohesive policy for addressing all facets of park management is needed. In addition, these agencies often do not have adequate funding, or enough properly trained staff to carry out their mandates.

(4) **Improved Maintenance:** The parks in North Cambridge are not adequately maintained. The City does not appear to have a systematic approach to maintenance; rather, parks seem to receive the most attention in those neighborhoods in which the community applies the greatest degree of pressure. Frequently, parks are created or renovated and then they quickly deteriorate because

they are not properly maintained,. If the parks were better maintained, the City could save resources by having to renovate the parks less frequently.

(5) **Additional Open Space:** Assuming the City could improve the process by which existing parks are maintained, the Committee would like to see more green spaces added throughout North Cambridge. They would like to know what options exist for creating new parks and connecting open spaces. Finally, they wondered whether there are ways in which the City could require larger developments to provide greater amounts of open space as a public amenity.

(6) **Protection of Alewife Resources:** The Committee is very concerned with the wetlands in the Alewife area. These urban wilds are the last remaining natural land in Cambridge and, as such, should be protected. Not only are these lands important aesthetically, wetlands serve important ecological functions as well. In addition to protecting the wetlands, the Committee would like to see them maintained at a higher level. Finally, the Committee expressed the need to increase the public's awareness of the value of these lands.

Parks and Open Space Recommendations

(1) The City is currently working on developing a comprehensive maintenance plan for its parks. As part of this effort, the City should:

- Examine ways to improve the coordination among the various city agencies involved in park services.
- Take measures to ensure that sufficient funds exist to hire an appropriate number of skilled staff, or train current employees in all aspects of park maintenance, and to provide the staff with adequate resources to carry out their jobs effectively.

- Consider the creation of a formal Adopt-a-Park program, whereby a park employee would coordinate efforts of resident groups, community organizations and neighborhood businesses to help maintain the parks.
- Dispense more trash receptacles throughout the neighborhood.
- Enforce the dog laws and post more signs about dog laws in the parks.

(2) Undertake a thorough open space plan for North Cambridge to establish future open space and recreational priorities. The plan should:

- Document the types of open space uses which exist in the neighborhood;
- Determine whether this amount and mix is appropriate given the current and projected demographic composition of the neighborhood;
- Recommend ways to create additional open spaces and community gardens in North Cambridge; encourage landscaping, tree planting, and sitting areas throughout the neighborhood, and ensure that all residents have access to the type of open space which meets their needs.

(3) Expand the Community Development Department's outreach process to encourage community involvement during the park planning and design stages. The following are some suggestions for ways to improve the participation process:

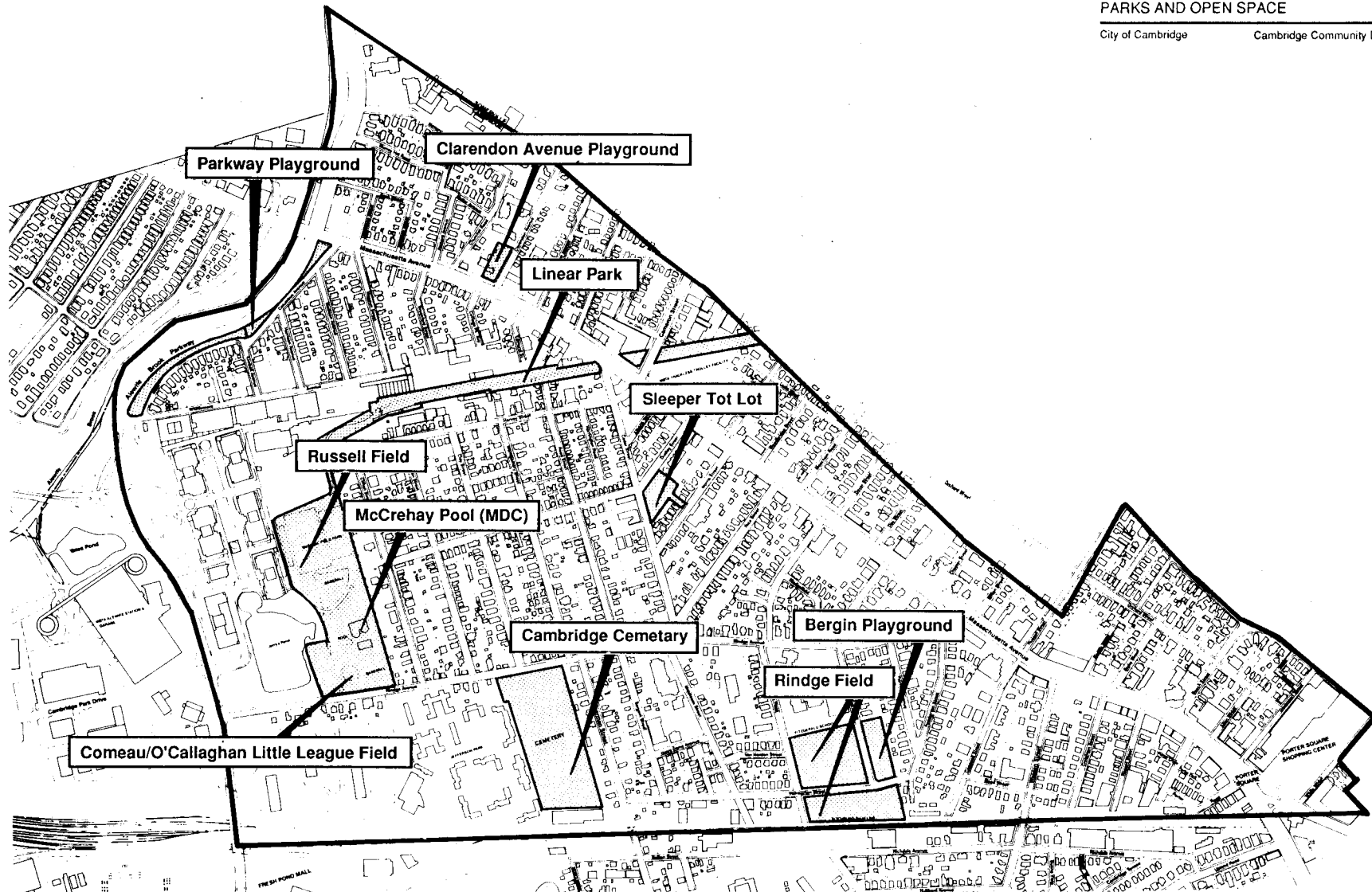
- Encourage park users (children, teenagers, adults, and older persons) to participate in all phases of planning, design and maintenance;
- Make the process as creative and fun as possible;
- Place signs in parks inviting people to attend meetings when any kind of park renovations are planned;

NORTH CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development
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(4) Continue to work with the Commission on Handicapped Persons and area residents to ensure that those people with special needs have sufficient amounts of recreation areas and equipment accessible to them.

(5) Increase the level of safety so that residents, particularly older people, feel safe using the parks.

(6) Improve safety in Linear Park by keeping it better maintained, including shovelling the snow and ice in the winter and repairing light fixtures when necessary.

(7) Investigate potential funding sources to allow the Committee on Public Planting to purchase more trees for North Cambridge streets.

(8) Encourage the establishment of an ongoing program for the maintenance and grooming of City trees and public plantings.

(9) Renovate the Pemberton Street lot next to the tennis courts to some form of open space which can be agreed to by area residents.

C O N C L U S I O N



Conclusion

This report has shown that North Cambridge is composed of an ethnically diverse population, split almost evenly between residents who have lived in the neighborhood less than five years and those who have lived there more than five. Newcomers tend to have higher educational levels, work in professional jobs, and have higher incomes than those living in the neighborhood more than five years.

While much of the residential portions of the neighborhood will remain stable in the near future, new development could occur in the Industry A-1 and Industry C zones, as well as on Massachusetts Avenue, and in most of Alewife. To further enhance and protect the residential character of North Cambridge, residents and the City should, in the near future, reexamine the development potential in these areas. Particular attention should be addressed to the fragile environmental features of the urban wilds in the Alewife area.

The Study also makes clear the need to improve the process by which land use and development policies are made and implemented. Several recommendations have been suggested. The col-

laborative nature of this report and the soundness of its recommendations are strong signal of the value and opportunities inherent in this approach to planning for the future.

In addition to examining potential development, topics which influence daily life in North Cambridge today were examined. Recommendations regarding the provision of affordable housing, improvements to the planning and maintenance of parks and playgrounds, and steps to address traffic concerns are outlined. It is intended that the implementation of these recommendations will improve the quality of life in North Cambridge and will also assist low to moderate income families to remain in the neighborhood. Generational continuity within a community, clearly enhances the richness of its history and culture. It is a goal the report strives to address.

A resounding conclusion evidenced throughout the Study calls for the City and community to continue to work closely to insure a stronger and better North Cambridge neighborhood. The North Cambridge Neighborhood Study has established the foundation for joint planning on the future of this neighborhood.